

Margaret Reynolds (1625-1688), Early Quaker of Chichester

By Geoffrey Barber



Fig. 1. Margreat[sic] Reynolds' token, 1667, with bakers' guild coat of arms.

A couple of years ago I wrote an article for the SFH titled "*Mary Akehurst (c1635-1691), Early Quaker of Lewes*" which described Mary as first and foremost a Quaker, but also a widow and merchant carrying on her husband's business and in 1667 issuing a merchant's token which bore her name.¹ In pursuing my interest in 17th century tokens, I have since discovered that there is another Quaker widow, Margaret REYNOLDS of Chichester, who issued a halfpenny token in the same year, 1667.

Margaret EXTON was baptised 5 Feb 1625/26 at Chichester St Pancras, daughter of John and Alice. It was there she married William REYNOLDS on 6 Mar 1644/45.

They had nine children:

Margaret REYNOLDS: b. 7 Dec 1645, Chichester St Pancras; m. 1669 Joshua KINCH.

Elizabeth REYNOLDS: b. 24 Feb 1646/7, buried 26 Dec 1647, Chichester St Pancras.

Samuel REYNOLDS: mentioned in his mother and father's will.²

William REYNOLDS: b. 4 Sep 1648 at Chichester St Pancras.

John REYNOLDS: b. 24 Oct 1650 at Chichester St. Pancras.

Francis REYNOLDS: b. 27 Oct 1652 at Chichester St. Pancras; m. 1681, Mary BOWBROOK.

Henry REYNOLDS: b. 23 Sep 1655 at Chichester St Pancras, d. 1724 at PA, USA.

Mary REYNOLDS: b. 20 Jun 1657, d. 31 Dec 1659 at Chichester St Pancras.

James REYNOLDS: b. 10 Oct 1660 at Chichester St Pancras.

William REYNOLDS, gentleman, made a will on 18 Feb 1660/61 before embarking on "a great journey about my necessary occasions, and not knowing whether it be the will of God that I shall returne againe". The will was written nine months after the restoration of the monarchy following the English Civil War period and it may reflect concerns regarding his future. William CAWLEY, the Chichester MP who played a major role in the fall of Chichester to Parliamentary forces in 1642, had been exiled to the Continent having been one of the signatories on Charles I's death warrant. William REYNOLDS, said to have been paymaster to the Garrison of Chichester,³ may have had concerns about his safety or future albeit the lenience and tolerance promised by Charles II. Where he travelled, and if he returned, is not known. The will was probated on 9 Apr 1664 but his burial has not been found. However, there is a gap in the Chichester Quaker burial register from 22 Oct 1662 – 30 Sep 1665. The Chichester St Pancras burials were also poorly kept between 1642 and about 1680 (with only one burial: in 1664).

His will shows him to be a man of means, leaving twenty pounds to each of his six sons and one surviving daughter, Margaret, to be paid when they reach 21 years of age (or day of marriage in Margaret's case). The remainder of the estate was left to his wife Margaret.

¹ Sussex Family Historian, Vol. 23 No. 6, June 2019.

² In both the will of William Reynolds and Margaret Carter, their son Samuel is mentioned first in the list of children, suggesting he was the eldest. His baptism has not been found and birth doesn't seem to fit in before William's, raising some questions.

³ <https://www.reynoldspatova.org/getperson.php?personID=I9583&tree=reynolds1> (this has not been verified – source not given)

As a widow, Margaret operated a baker's shop. We know this because in 1667 she issued a halfpenny token in her name with the coat of arms of the Bakers' Guild. Her token reads: MARGREAT.REYNOLDS around a beaded circle with the Baker's coat of arms within, and on the reverse: LIVEING.AT.CHICHESTER around a beaded circle with HER HALF PENY 1667 within. A fine example of Margaret REYNOLDS' token can be seen on the British Museum website.⁴

Due to a chronic shortage of small coinage, merchants resorted to issuing tokens so they could provide change to customers. There is evidence to show that these tokens could be accepted at other businesses if it was known that the issuing merchant would honour their value. Sometimes a town or village would also issue tokens to facilitate trade amongst the poorer people. It is said that over 20,000 different tokens were issued in England and Wales from 1648 until 1672 when the copper currency of farthings and halfpennies was finally introduced. A recommended read on this is George Berry's "Seventeenth Century England: Traders and Their Tokens".⁵

Over 230 Sussex 17th century tokens have been identified. This includes die varieties so the number of different issuers is somewhat less than this. The relatively low number is probably a reflection of the population and economy in Sussex towns and villages compared to places like London where a few thousand were issued. It is also said that much of Sussex came late to token-issuing.

Also in 1667, Margaret Reynolds decided to marry again. On 19 Mar 1666/67 Margaret REYNOLDS, widow of Chichester St Pancras, and John CARTER, cordwainer of Chichester, obtained a marriage licence. They married the same day at Merston, near Chichester. John was possibly a widower as there is an earlier marriage of a John CARTER, cordwainer of Chichester St Pancras, to Mary BRADFIELD on 23 Jun 1664 but there are no burial records to be able to confirm Mary's death.

Margaret's will made many years later shows that she had made an agreement with John CARTER before her marriage, retaining a degree of independence. It was unusual for a married woman to make a will as under the law of coverture, a woman's legal rights and obligations were subsumed by those of her husband - only an unmarried woman or widow had the right to own property and therefore make a will. However, Margaret did make a will as a married woman stating that it was "according to and in pursuance of an Agreement made with my said husband John CARTER before my intermarriage with him".

It is after her marriage in 1666/67 that we start to see evidence of Margaret's involvement with the Society of Friends (Quakers), although it is likely to have begun earlier than this. A clue to when that could be may be the fact that their last child baptised in the Anglican Church at Chichester St Pancras was Mary in 1657. The subsequent child James is missing suggesting that they may have become Quakers about 1658-60. Although the birth of their children are recorded in Quaker records from 1652, this is not evidence that they were Quakers at that time. It is almost certain that these records were written at a later date as it is believed that the movement did not begin until after George Fox's visit in 1655. The Quaker birth register is written neatly in one hand from 1651 to 1669, suggesting that it may have been written around 1669. Woolley states "Records were sparse until 1668 when an organisational structure was established, but there were clearly Quakers in Chichester from 1655 - albeit without all the minutes and records which later became such a feature of Quaker life".⁶

⁴ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_T-5355 (visited 23 Aug 2021).

⁵ Berry, George. "Seventeenth Century England: Traders and Their Tokens", 1988, B.A. Seaby Ltd.

⁶ Woolley, Michael. The Quakers in Chichester 1655 – 1967, 4th Edition 2006. Viewed online at: <https://michaelwoolley.weebly.com/> (visited 21/8/2021).

The first reliable evidence is seen when Margaret CARTER and her daughter, Margaret REYNOLDS, are listed in the assembly of Friends who witnessed the marriage of John SMITH⁷ and Priscilla SPARKMAN on 24 Nov 1668. One year later, her daughter Margaret REYNOLDS married Joshua KINCH on 6 Jul 1669 at a Quaker meeting held at the dwelling house of Margery Wilkinson, with her brothers William, Francis and Henry in attendance.

Being a Quaker in these early times was a risky business and required great faith and dedication. Having a Quaker marriage, as daughter Margaret did, could get you into trouble as these couples discovered in 1673:⁸

“In this Year *Elias Ellis* of *Warbleton*, and *Mary* his Wife, *Tristram Martin* of *Arundel* and his Wife, and *John Cuoknall* of the same Place, and his Wife, were prosecuted in the Ecclesiastical Court, and excommunicated, for cohabiting as married Persons, because they had not conformed to the Ceremonies of the Church of England in that Behalf; but had publicly declared their Marriage in another Form”

The Anglican Church and local officials were often relentless in their efforts to punish Quakers for holding their meetings, non-attendance at church, non-payment of church tithes and refusal to swear oaths and serve in the military. The punishments included fines or goods distrained and long periods in gaol in terrible conditions. Conditions started to improve after the death of King Charles II in 1685 and the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689 which granted freedom of worship to Nonconformists.

However, there is no mention in the Quaker Sufferings of Margaret REYNOLDS/CARTER. In fact, Chichester seems to have been spared the harsh and vicious treatment meted out at Lewes, although violent disruption of meetings and fines for attending Quaker meetings are recorded. So perhaps Margaret was more cautious and risk averse than Mary Akehurst at Lewes, who did suffer terribly, and also the people of Chichester may have been a little more tolerant (it was after all a Parliamentary/Protestant town during the Civil War).

I came across an interesting comment by Woolley in his book “The Quakers of Chichester 1655-1967”:

Sussex Quarterly Meeting requested Ambrose Galloway, a draper from Lewes, to collect information from Friends about their sufferings. He recorded them year by year starting back in 1655 listing fines and imprisonments.

This was of interest because Ambrose Galloway was a merchant who also issued a token in 1667. So we have Margaret Reynolds, Mary Akehurst and Ambrose Galloway, all Quakers and all issuing tokens in 1667. They doubtlessly knew about each other and I am sure that Ambrose would have met both Margaret and Mary in his travels, perhaps discussing the problems of coinage and tokens!

Margaret made her will in 1684 and probably died in 1688 as the will was probated in that year.⁹ A summary of her will is as follows:

⁷ John SMITH is almost certainly the person who issued two undated tokens at Chichester (Kerridge 37, 37a). One token depicts the Grocer's Arms and the other St Lawrence the martyr holding a book and a gridiron (he was burnt on a gridiron), perhaps in recognition of his own sufferings as a Quaker. See Kerridge & de Ruiter, “The Tokens, Metallic Tickets, Checks and Passes of West Sussex, 1650-1950”, p.56.

⁸ Besse, Joseph. A collection of the sufferings of the people called Quakers, for the testimony of a good conscience from the time of their being first distinguished by that name in the year 1650 to the time of the act commonly called the Act of toleration granted to Protestant dissenters in the first year of the reign of King William the Third and Queen Mary in the year 1689 (Volume 1)

⁹ Will of Margaret Carter of Chichester, made 8 Dec 1684, proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 15 Oct 1688. (The National Archives: PROB 11/393/127)

Margaret Carter wife of **John Carter** of Chichester in the County of Sussex Merchant
To John Carter, my husband, four shillings
To my son Samuel Reynolds, five shillings
To my daughter Margaret Kinch, wife of Joshua Kinch, fishmonger of London, ten pounds
To my son William Reynolds, five shillings
To my son John Reynolds, five shillings
To my son Francis Reynolds, ten pounds
To my son Henry Reynolds, ten pounds
To my son James Reynolds, twenty pounds
Legacies to various grandchildren
To Mary Plummer, wife of Thomas Plummer of London, mariner, two pounds ten shillings
Son James Reynolds sole executor, Joshua Kinch overseer

Margaret's burial has not been found, but there is a gap in the Chichester St Pancras burial register 1686-1694 (except for one burial in 1687, another 1691) and the Quaker burials seem to have been poorly kept at that time. Her husband's burial has not been found either.

Margaret shared a sense for business and independence with Mary Akehurst of Lewes. Margaret demonstrated this with the agreement made with her second husband, and Mary by the fact she never remarried after her husband's early death yet still continued to raise a family and run a business. Their endeavours would have been supported and respected within the Quaker community.

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Postscript

Research by others shows that Margaret's son Henry REYNOLDS emigrated to Pennsylvania, America in 1676 and married there in 1678.¹⁰ I have not verified or followed up on this.

In 1682 the famous Quaker William Penn left his home at Warminghurst, West Sussex for the New World with about a hundred Quakers, many from the Horsham Monthly Meeting but some perhaps from Chichester. There were already a few Quaker settlers in the new colony when Penn and his group arrived. He founded the town of Philadelphia and there is a township a few miles to the west called, nostalgically, Chichester.

¹⁰ <https://www.reynoldspatova.org/getperson.php?personID=I10794&tree=reynolds1> (visited 22 Aug 2021)